

IMB MISSIONS COLLEGE



The Great Commission Among Muslims

**Basic Overview of Islam and
How To Begin**



INTRODUCTION

- **Islam** means *submission* [to the will of God.] It comes from the same root word as salaam (shalom), the word for peace.
- **Muslim** means one who submits himself to the will of God, so a practitioner of Islam.
- **Allah** is the Arabic word for God and refers to the one (only) God who created the world, Adam and Eve, told Noah to build the Ark, led the Israelites out of Egypt, etc., (think Gott and God, El or Eloah-Hebrew, Elah-Aramaic). There are other languages with words for God used by Muslims, i.e., “Khuda” in Persian, but Arabic sets the standard for Islam. However, we know their understanding of God is quite different from our understanding of God.
- Islam is a **monotheistic** and **Abrahamic religion**. Abraham (*Ibrahim*) is considered the father of their faith, along with Judaism and Christianity. It began in the year 610 AD.
- There are approximately **1.8 billion Muslims** around the world today, but the majority are concentrated in North Africa, Middle East, and South Asia. Currently, it is the **world’s 2nd largest religion**, with Muslims comprising approximately **23% + of the world’s population**.
- **Islam asserts** the collective thought that there is **only one God** (Creator), **Mohammed is his final prophet**, and the **Quran is his final word to mankind**.



FIVE PILLARS OF ISLAM

(the framework)

- **Declaration of Faith (*Shahada*):** *There is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is God's messenger.* This is the foundation for everything in Islam. *Shahada* literally means testimony, and this testimony is heard and spoken daily by Muslims.
- **Ritual Prayer (*Salat*):** Observed 5 times a day, and congregationally on Friday. It is second in importance of the pillars, as man is not born sinful in Islam, rather he is born forgetful.
- **Almsgiving (*Zakat*):** Muslims are obligated to give 2.5% of their total wealth each year to the poor and needy, or others who qualify to receive charitable help.
- **Fasting (*Sawm*):** Observed during the holy month of Ramadan each year. This is meant to be a time of self-reflection, gratitude, and spiritual renewal.
- **Pilgrimage (*Hajj*):** If they can afford it, Muslims should travel to Mecca and reenact the final pilgrimage of Mohammed. The main site is considered the holiest in Islam and is also linked to Abraham and Ishmael. Those who complete the Hajj are thought to have their past sins forgiven and draw closer to God. They are also permitted to use the title *Haji*.



IN ISLAM...

- **Who is God?** He is the eternal creator and sustainer of the universe, who is holy, powerful, and all knowing. He possesses identifiable qualities (merciful, kind, etc.), yet he is transcendent and personally unknowable. He is indivisibly one, and whatever he wills, will be.
- **Who is Mankind?** They are God's pinnacle creation known as the children of Adam and God's vicereagents on earth. Their primary purpose is to worship God and submit to his will.
- **What is Sin?** A conscientious act that violates God's laws or commands. Man is not born sinful; they don't inherit the sins of Adam/Eve. But man is born forgetful [of God], thus he sins. If ones does sin, they should repent and ask forgiveness, and God will forgive him. Young children are seen as innocent.
- **Who is Mohammad?** He is God's final and most important prophet. He received the revelation of the Quran from the angel Gabriel and is considered the founder Islam. He was a man who sinned; thus, he should not be worshipped. He is considered the most faithful of Muslims.
- **Who is Jesus?** Though not all Muslims agree, Jesus is often said to be the second greatest prophet in Islam. However, many Muslims avoid learning about him in deference to Mohammad. They reject the idea that he is God, or that he died when on the cross. They do believe he was born of a virgin, completed miracles, ascended to heaven without dying, and will return in the end to break the Cross, defeat the anti-Christ, and call all people to Islam.



IN ISLAM...

- **How is one accepted by God?** By believing in the teachings of Islam, adhering to its laws, and doing good works. In the end, if your good works outweigh your bad, and God is merciful, you will go to Paradise. (*Barzakh*, time of suffering in the grave that makes ready those who need it).
- **What Scriptures are accepted in Islam?** The Quran (most important, holy scripture); they also accept the Pentateuch (*Tawrat*), Psalms (*Zabur*), Gospels* (*Injil*, *a gospel given to Jesus).
- **What other sources have authority?** The Hadith (highly influential, recorded sayings of Mohammad), the Sunnah (recorded habits or practices of Mohammad), and Qiyas (related deductions of the Sharia Law).
- **What role does Islam Play in Everyday Life?** In places where Islam is the norm, it is woven into all aspects of life. It impacts daily rhythms for individuals and communities, shapes family and social structures, is directly linked to important holidays, influences laws, etc. When Muslims are called out of Islam to Christ, they are often leaving behind their culture, family structures, ways of life. It can be very challenging for them.
- **Important Advice:** Do not knowingly speak negatively about Mohammad with Muslims you are engaging. If you have a Quran or a Bible with you, do not put it on the floor, toss it on the table, take it into a bathroom, etc. Treat it with respect. These small actions can close the door on your opportunity to share the Gospel very quickly.



COMMON OBSTACLES TO THE GOSPEL

(See notes for answers on separate document for first three)

- Muslims seriously struggle with concepts like the Trinity, Jesus being called the Son of God, his death on the cross, or that He was fully God and man. These ideas are completely blasphemous to Muslims. Why do they object to these truths and what can we say?
- Many Muslims say the Bible or Injil can't be trusted, because it has been corrupted? How should we respond?
- Grace vs Good Works (*Sawab*): This one runs under the surface, yet is a big one, because it is radically opposite of Islam. The idea of endless grace seems to challenge the holiness, strength, and they wonder if God is painted as weak in this? What can we say to this?
- There are many prophets and stories from Islam that overlap with the Bible. At first glance, these shared stories appear quite similar, but their inner messages are far from God's truth. For example, does God call Abraham to sacrifice Isaac or Ishmael? It matters! We can use these commonalities to build bridges, but we must always clearly communicate what Scripture says from the start.



COMMON OBSTACLES TO THE GOSPEL

- Be careful not to assume that overlapping stories or concepts lead to the same actions, conclusions, or truths (i.e., forgiveness from God or sin). Be clear about who Jesus is, his message, and what Scriptures says about man, God, and other concepts. Acknowledge shared similarities and build off it but help them understand that Christ alone is the fulfillment of God's plan for mankind, and that through him alone can man be accepted by God.
- Don't worry about not being able to explain away every argument they have with Scripture or answer every question they throw at you. Don't get caught in arguments. If you can, read up on how best to answer them; try to learn! But most importantly, focus on Jesus, follow the Holy Spirit, listen and share God's truth, and pray.
- For many Muslims, their cultural identity to Islam is so deep it is hard to break that bondage. Only the Holy Spirit can convince them otherwise, so pray for them consistently.
- Islam teaches you can never be forgiven by God if you leave Islam. We must understand that when a Muslims follows Christ, they are not simply choosing a different faith or philosophy, as the West often sees it. Instead, they are typically seen as rejecting their entire family and culture that is built around Islam, and they can lose them in the process. For many, the cost is high to follow Christ.



WHAT CAN IT LOOK LIKE WHEN MUSLIMS COME TO CHRIST?

- Though it can happen quickly, or even immediately, it can sometimes be a slower process than we see in the US. They may need to hear God's truth many times, and possibly from multiple people. Be steadfast in sharing/prayer, and foster moments of decision for them.
- They may use different words or phrases to describe what God is doing in their life or how Jesus is revealing himself. Ask the HS to help you understand them. Don't be overly critical about what they are/aren't saying, or how they are saying it. Instead, focus on whether they understand the message of the Gospel. Are they responding to Jesus, as defined by the Gospel? Do they get it? Everything else will fall into place in time, as they begin to grow in Christ as his disciple.
- Scripture, whether read or listened to, plays an important role. It often directly challenges what Islam has taught them about Jesus and Christians and can carry authority far beyond us.
- In addition to hearing God's truth and prayer, sometimes the HS needs to do something very clear to help them cross over in faith. He may give them dreams or visions, perform a miracle, directly answer a prayer said in desperation or secret, or send them someone they trust to verify Jesus is God. Be careful not to devalue this or hyperfocus on it, instead work with the HS.



SIMPLE ADVICE ON SPIRITUAL AND PHYSICAL INTERACTIONS

- Learn to ask great open-ended questions and learn to listen. This is so important for learning where they are spiritually and moving a conversation towards Jesus. Asking the right question, or a good question, can create opportunities to say important things.
- Respond to the person in front of you. Just like us, Muslims exists on a large spectrum. They don't always fit into a box, so don't force them into one. Actively listen to them and meet them where they are with the Gospel of Jesus. (Ex: Some mosques in US often are set up similarly to US churches.)
- It's easy to talk about God with Muslims, but we must get to Jesus. Start with God, but don't get stuck there. Remember, Jesus is the one called the stumbling block in Scripture.
- Let the Old Testament speak to the validity of Jesus and his gospel. Remember, they "accept" the 5 Books of Moses, the Psalms, many of the prophets, and the Gospels*.
- Though singled-out verses are good, do your best to get them reading or hearing large sections of Scripture. Help them to see a larger picture vs. singled out concepts, if possible.



SIMPLE ADVICE ON SPIRITUAL AND PHYSICAL INTERACTIONS

- We never hold back the Gospel in order to build relationships. Instead, we share the things that matter to us in sincere and organic ways from the very start (Jesus, his gospel, our faith), as we build trust and friendship with them. You can do both authentically; they will be doing it too.
- Be wise and careful with the opposite gender; cultures interpret gestures and actions differently!
- Be modest in your dress. When people question our character, they are less prone to listen to your words or trust your faith!
- Practice hospitality and be generous with your time! These two things speak volumes to people coming from Muslims background.
- Avoid offering them pork or alcohol. Even when they say they are okay with it, don't initiate it and be very slow to give it.
- Pray with them! Even when language is a challenge or your beliefs are distant, ask if you can pray with them and for them in the name of Jesus.
- Even when you disagree with them, remember that they are God's creation made in his image, and he longs for them to worship him.
- Sincerity covers a multitude of mistakes.



“When asked what God had used to bring them to faith in Jesus Christ, Turkestani Muslim-background believers talked about the role of dreams, the importance of having a New Testament in their own language, watching the JESUS Film, and other factors. But the most important thread linking each testimony was the discovery of a living Christ who heard and answered their prayers. Unlike the empty offerings of Communism or secular atheism, Christ touched a deep place in their soul that nothing else had ever filled.”

David Garrison, A Wind in the House of Islam: How God is drawing Muslims around the world to faith in Jesus Christ



“For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. How, then, can they call on him they have not believed in? And how can they believe without hearing about him? And how can they hear without a preacher? And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news.”

Romans 10:13-15

